

# Meatballs

“You get no bread with one meatball.” Nov 26, 2001  
Depression era folk song

PLEASE PASS THIS ON

Meatballs is put out in the belief that a strong union at SHAP depends on an informed and involved membership. Meatballs welcomes different points of view. Contact Mike Parker, electrician second shift, body shop, or you can email meatballs@rts-tech.com. Publication labor is voluntary and views are those of the writers.

## Mike Parker

### For Delegate to the Skilled Trades Conference

I am asking for your support for conference delegate because I believe that this union is in crisis and we should use the opportunity of this election to begin to discuss how we should deal with it.

We need to focus on maintaining our skills. It is our skills combined in the organization of a union which forces management to treat us with respect. Right now management would face a disaster if it tried to run the plant without the trades. But if the point comes that management believes it can limp through production without the unionized trades, there will be an all-out attack on us. And it is not so far off. That is what management did at Caterpillar and at Ravenswood Aluminum. And remember that we work for a company which has a number of non-union production plants in the U.S.

Specifically, I believe that management is setting up the long-term war by trying to deskill the trades, to turn us into machine tenders, set-up people, and flexible human robots who follow a standardized program. They do this in a number of ways:

- Shifting skilled work to outside contractors
- Using training methods that are proven failures
- Substituting computerized knowledge for trades' judgment

We need to use the Skilled Trades Conference to exchange information with other locals to find out all we can about management pilot programs in Total Productive Maintenance and Total Predictive Maintenance, the latest buzzwords. And together we must establish a bargaining program that can defend the trades in the future. Since management is using “Benchmarking” studies as a way to direct their downsizing of the trades, we need to understand the realities at other plants.

But we have to do more than depend on our delegates and our national and local union leaders. Defending our skill and our union requires all of us getting involved.

1. Everybody has to be careful and watch out for each other. Management is willing to throw the book at individuals for tiny infractions, hoping it can use these as bargaining chips with the union. Our Local leadership has

Thank you, supervisor Tim Storey, for reminding us why we need a strong union and suggesting the title for this publication.

refused to be taken in by management's game but the game still takes its toll.

2. Solidarity has to be real--between all trades and between trades and production. No pointing fingers at each other.

3. Management takes advantage of our natural willingness to help each other. As long as we are properly staffed and given proper materials, tools and support, we will go the extra mile to make things purr. Similarly, in a real emergency we all pitch in. But a lack of planning on management's part does not constitute an emergency on ours.

*And when we are purposely short-staffed, our most important obligation is to make sure we are not rushed into making mistakes, overlooking safety, allowing poor quality to go through, or not doing a thorough root-cause repair.*

4. For our own self-respect we have to continue to take pride in our crafts and in our work. We have to press for and find proper training, and insist on learning and doing the new technology work while maintaining our current work. The poor training we receive is not an accident but fits in with management's vision of skilled trades as flexible operators.

5. Finally, we have to make it clear that we defend our work. Management must not be allowed to buy off our opposition to outsourcing simply by offering to pay us to do nothing for a short time while they reduce us with attrition and establish new precedents. Once we lose work, it is very hard to get it back. We have to explain the situation to every contractor who tries to do our work and stop the practice of turning a blind eye to contractors' work when they come in to “advise.” ?

#### Resolutions for skilled trades conference

I have written a series of draft resolutions for the skilled trades conference. If any one would like to work on any of these with me or would like to see copies in advance of the meeting give me a holler.

- Fighting for New Tech Work for the Trades; Fighting Deskilling of Trades
- Full Utilization of Skilled Trades
- No Working Alone in Dangerous Situations; Responsibility in Safety Procedures
- On-site Training Centers; Peer Training for New Technology
- Computer Work and Training
- Changes in Codes and License Requirements
- Right to Examine Contract Before Voting
- Union Solidarity and Scab Suppliers

## ***SHAP-POO (Management Figures)***

The issue of blacking out holidays remains.

The day after July 4th was blacked, Ron Czar met with shift meetings of skilled trades to explain why. He gave generalities about "business decisions," "bottom line," and "contributing to the corporation turn-around" but refused to give us any specific figures. "I talk about these with your union leadership," he said. So the union leadership told us management's claims.

In their initial presentation to the union, Kris told us, management argued that working the trades was much more expensive than outside contractors. Management included in their figures for trades' cost:

- Triple hourly wages for holiday work
- Time and 1/2 wages to pay for coverage of the optional PA day.

1. Of course the holiday triple wages are an illusion. The company has to pay us straight time holiday pay regardless of whether we work or don't. What the company pays us for **working** a holiday is simply double time. In this regard there is no difference whether we work a holiday or a Sunday.

2. The extra pay for the PA option is also wrong. The optional PA conversion does not give us an additional paid day off. It

simply allows us to defer our holiday pay to schedule a day off later. So at most the company's extra payout for a PA option equals 1/2 wages rather than 1 1/2. But then the company should also figure in the percentage of those who do not take the option, the percentage of those who do not take all their PA days--and the **savings** management makes when it fails to cover PA absences.

In reality, even when taken, the extra PA days benefit the company and probably cost it nothing. Most of us who need a day off for a medical, family or other important reason would just take it and accept the discipline. But then we also would not notify management in advance. So the PA days are really a win-win arrangement. Management knows in advance when there will be an absence so they can plan, and we keep our records clean.

3. Management's arguments fail to look at real "bottom line" issues, including the higher productivity of having people who know the plant and equipment do the work. On virtually every project we have done for the plant, the company has saved big bucks.

Management chose not to address issues of quality.

Management ignored the costs of low morale that comes when you treat people, their lives, and their time as disposable. ?

## **A bit about me**

I have been a UAW Journeyman electrician since 1978 and have worked at Chrysler Warren Stamping, Ford Rouge, and Rouge Steel. I have also worked for industrial electronics contractors doing controls engineering, programming, and electrical work and have taught electronics and programming for electricians at Henry Ford Community College and in plants through HFCC-organized training programs.

I have written articles and books and consulted with a number of unions on new technology and so-called work reorganization issues. These include the Teamsters, Oil Chemical and Atomic Workers, and Canadian Auto Workers (national unions) as well as numerous local unions trying to deal with these difficult problems.

I believe those of you who know me can testify that I work well with others and live the union belief that we all have to succeed together for success to stick. I oppose all attempts to pit union members against each other. I am willing to take strong and open stands against those in power even when it is not popular. I try to use my writing and speaking abilities to learn from others and share knowledge to makes us all stronger.

Most important, we must maintain the strength and skill of the trades. This is not just an issue for the union leadership. Rather it is something we have to do for ourselves and expect the union leadership to back us. We have to support each other, share knowledge and train each other, using whatever scraps of opportunity we can get from the company. I try to walk the talk.

I regularly attend union meetings and skilled trades meetings and volunteer for other union activities like the worker-to-worker committee. The decent conditions we have today are the result of many people before us making sacrifices as part of the union struggle and we owe it to them and to those, our children, who will go after us, to maintain a strong union.

I truly like my electrician's job and prefer it to any full-time union position. Unionized trades jobs are among the best there are in terms of dignity, interest and variety as well as pay. But these good conditions are under attack and we need to work to keep them good. I am glad that others take on the full-time union jobs—which require hard and often thankless work. But at bottom, *we* are the union. And the union and leaders can only be as strong as the membership is knowledgeable and active.

## **Mike Parker**

### **LAS VEGAS?**

The conference is in Las Vegas. Frankly, I think the union holding such meetings in Las Vegas rather than in Detroit is a sign of the sickness of the union. In these critical times the skilled trades conference could be one of the few opportunities for exchanging detailed information with tradespeople in other plants about technology, management attacks, and successful examples of resistance by the trades. Instead the meetings are converted into a party opportunities. At the very least we should attempt to reverse this direction and rebuild the trades into a strong force in dealing with the companies. ?